



Ancestors West

A quarterly publication for the members of the
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
Winter 2020 Vol. 45, No. 4

Winter Celebrations and More

Santa Barbara's Christmas
Trees of the Past

A Norwegian
Holiday Meal

A Christmas Voyage

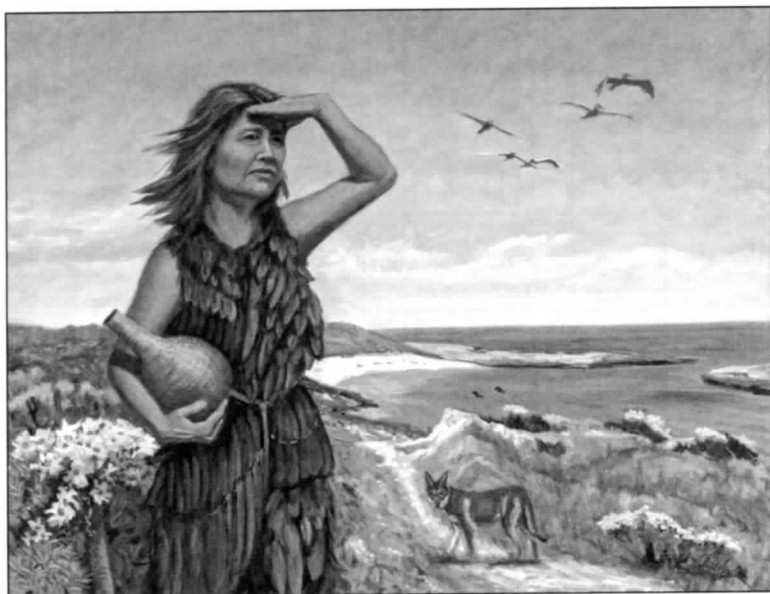
Sending a holiday tradition
that is priceless more than
90 years later...



Proof is in the Provenance:

—Juana Maria's Donut Stone— and a Compelling New Mystery

By Marla Daily

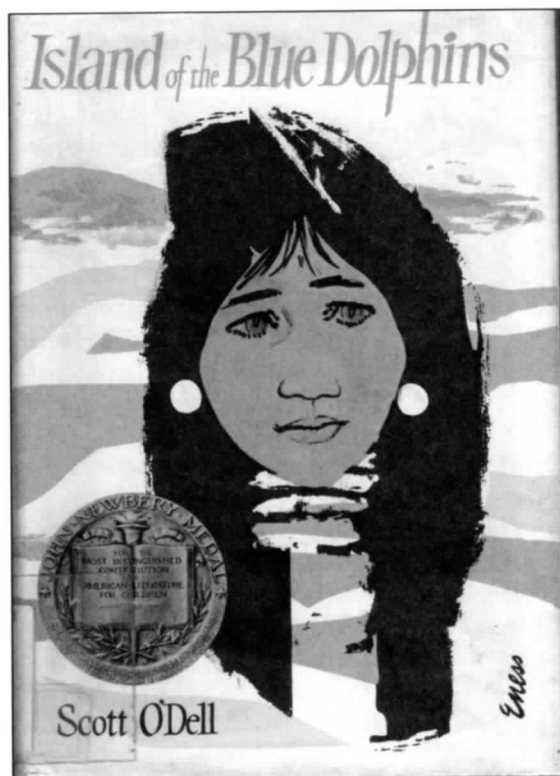


Portrait of Juana Maria, based on research by artist, Holli Harmon, 2017 (SBMNH)



JUANA MARIA'S DONUT STONE
Height 10 cm; length 11.5 cm; width 11.5 cm
Center perforation 3.8 cm in diameter
Decorative incised line around the rim of the base
Quarry source unknown
(Santa Cruz Island Foundation)

WITH THE 1960 PUBLICATION of Scott O'Dell's book, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, a fictionalized story of the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island was spread throughout California and beyond. Sixty years later, O'Dell's book is still required reading for California 4th grade students. The Nicoleño woman's life alone for eighteen years, and subsequent rescue from San Nicolas Island, is a California household story.

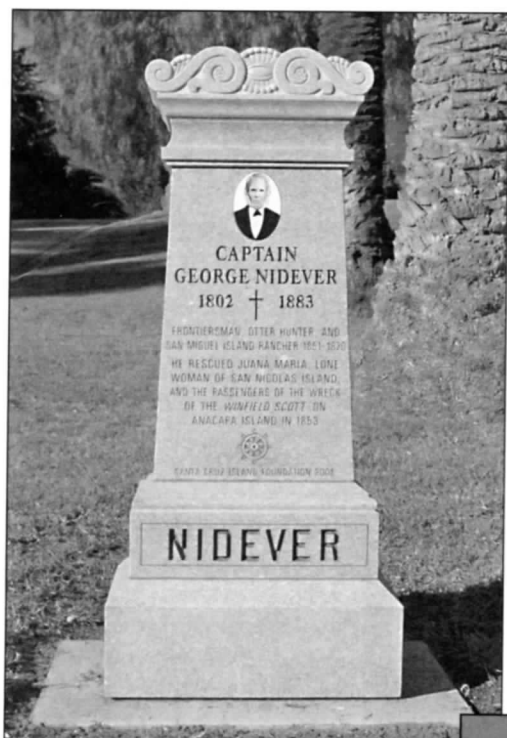


In 1853, pioneer frontiersman and otter hunter, George Nidever sailed from Santa Barbara to San Nicolas Island on an otter-hunting expedition. Over the several weeks he was there, he found footprints in the sand, and eventually located the Lone Woman. She returned with Nidever to his home in Santa Barbara¹, bringing with her precious few possessions, including a whale baleen hairpin², an abalone fish hook³, a chert bird point⁴, and a donut stone⁵. The Lone Woman, baptized as Juana Maria at the Santa Barbara Mission, died in the Nidever home on October 19, 1853, seven weeks to the day after she arrived. For his part, George Nidever (1802-1883) lived another 30 years.

It is this September 1853 San Nicolas Island adventure for which Nidever is perhaps most well known—more so than his rescue of the passengers of the *Winfield Scott* at Anacapa Island in December of the same year. In 1870, Ralph Waldo Emerson penned the poem, *COURAGE*, about George Nidever.

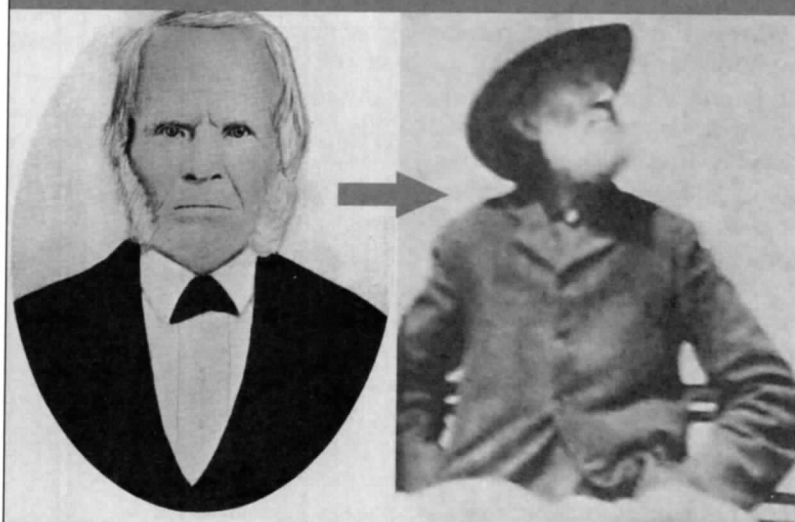
<https://www.islapedia.com/index.php?title=COURAGE>

Fast forward 125 years after Nidever's death, when I learned of the great history mystery surrounding his unknown final resting place. Through a set of fortuitous circumstances, in 2008 George Nidever's long-lost grave was discovered in Calvary Cemetery⁶ in a large unmarked family plot, along with his wife, Sinforosa, and sons Mark and Jake. With permission from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, on November 1, 2008, the Santa Cruz Island Foundation placed a period Victorian granite headstone⁷, designed by the great Santa Barbara stonemason, Osi DaRos (1921-2018), on the Nidever family grave. Jed Hendrickson



Captain George Nidever (1802-1883)

George Nidever gave Juana Maria's donut stone to his older brother John Nidever of Carpinteria, CA



of Santa Barbara Monumental fabricated and installed it.

A human-interest story about the forthcoming gravestone installation was published in the *Independent*. The office phone rang, and the caller introduced himself as Jim Leslie, George Nidever's great-grand nephew. Jim had read the article and was thrilled to learn of the grave discovery and headstone placement. "Would the Santa Cruz Island Foundation like Juana Maria's donut stone?" Jim asked. He explained that after Juana Maria died, George Nidever had given the stone to his older brother, John Nidever — Jim Leslie's great-great grandfather. It had passed down to Jim through four generations of Nidevers. In a most curious turn of events, Jim's grandfather, George Leslie, had been employed on Santa Cruz Island for several years in the 1860s, when, on February 12, 1865 he was one of three men drowned in the Channel while heading from the island to Santa Barbara in a small open boat. He was 27 years old, and left behind a wife and infant son — George Leslie's father!

Provenance of Juana Maria's Donut Stone



John Nidever (1844-1930)
Gave the stone to his daughter Nancy Ann (#8 of 12 children)



Nancy Ann Leslie (1796-1872) Passed the stone to her son, George Grant Leslie



George Grant Leslie (1864-1937) Passed the stone to his son, James Vincent Leslie



James Vincent Leslie (1929-2018) Great-great nephew of George Nidever, donated Juana Maria's donut stone to the Santa Cruz Island Foundation, 165 years after she brought it off San Nicolas Island



Proof is in the provenance! The donut stone can be traced from the hands of Juana Maria through the hands of five owners over 165 years. Thanks to Jim Leslie (1929-2018) and his wife Judy, the Santa Cruz Island Foundation is the proud recipient of Juana Maria's donut stone.

Now to the remaining mystery. Most donut stones found on San Nicolas Island are made of island sandstone, which this is not. A few others are made of soapstone⁸, which originated on Santa Catalina Island or from various mainland sources. Using an energy-dispersive spectrometry (EDS) system, geologists at UCSB⁹ were able to determine this donut stone has no "soapstone" affinity. It is metavolcanic rock, unmatched from any San Nicolas Island source. Further forensic studies remain to be carried out. Where was the stone quarried?

Through the generous sponsorship of Tony and Sabrina Papa, and of AGIA in honor of John Wigle (1950-2018), the donut stone will be placed on permanent exhibit in the Chrisman California Islands Center currently under development in Carpinteria.

ENDNOTES

1. Nidever's wife, Sinforosa, was caring for their five children, ages 2-11 when Juana Maria was added to their household.
2. American Museum of Natural History, New York
3. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Santa Barbara
4. *ibid*

5. Santa Cruz Island Foundation, Carpinteria

6. Clues to the location of the Nidever plot were uncovered by Alex Grzywacki in the original card file records of Calvary Cemetery, 199 N Hope Ave, Santa Barbara

7. Installation of upright headstones had been prohibited in Calvary Cemetery for decades. Special dispensation was granted by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to the Santa Cruz Island Foundation as a result of the case presented on behalf of the Nidever family.

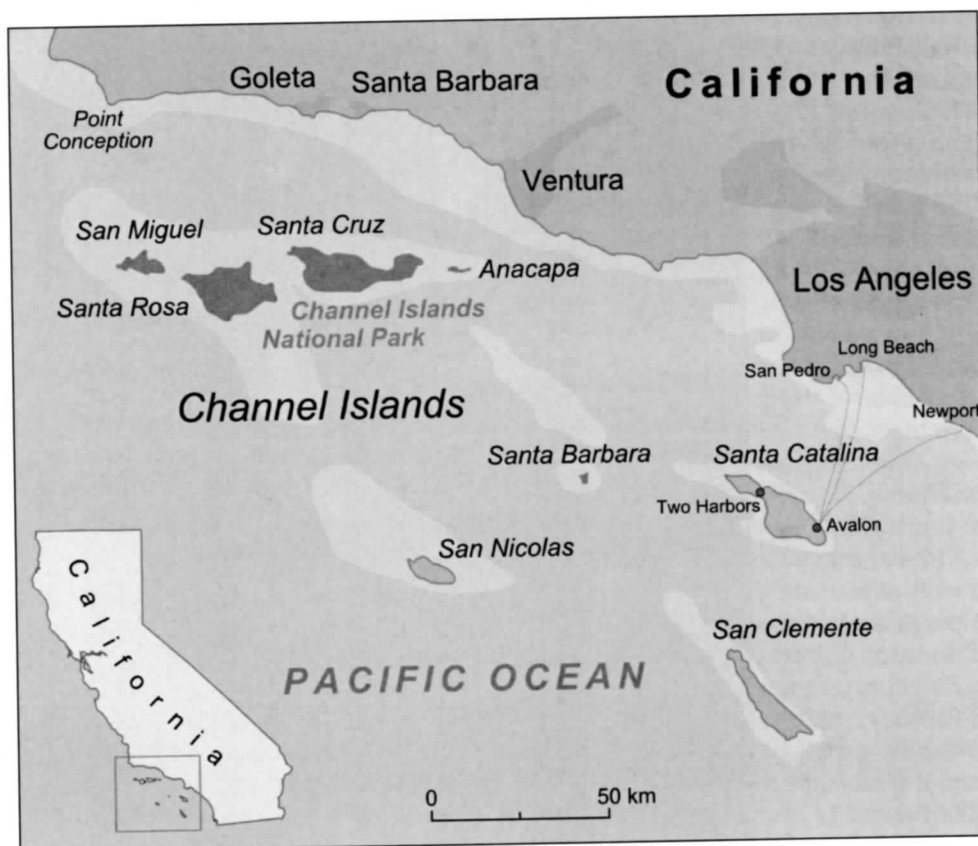
8. Steve Schwartz email to Marla Daily, July 8, 2014

9. Frank J. Spera and colleagues, Dept. of Earth Science & Earth Research Institute, UCSB



Cultural anthropologist, Marla Daily, President of the Santa Cruz Island Foundation, has been researching and writing about the California Islands for more than 40 years. She is a recipient of the California Historical Society's Distinguished Service Award for her dedicated efforts to preserve and promote the history of California's Islands. The Santa Barbara Independent also

recognized her with their Local Hero Award. Marla's free online California Islands encyclopedia, ISLAPEDIA.com, is now over 15,000 pages, and has served over 10 million users worldwide. She is currently developing the Chrisman California Islands Center in Carpinteria, CA.



Map of Channel Islands, California, Wikimedia Commons